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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the humanistic characteristics futurists predict will be needed by individuals who live in a more interdependent world and projects ways early childhood educators can teach children to deal with changing aspects of the world. Briefly discussed are teaching approaches for incorporating the coping and creative characteristics of young children into viable living skills for the future: (1) development of the child's self concepts; (2) development of the child's coping skills; (3) consideration of affect in the approach to teaching; (4) acquisition of a future focused role-image; (5) emphasis on interpersonal cooperation; (6) development of interpersonal skills; and (7) emphasis on working with parents. (SE)

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NEW STRATEGIES FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

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The purpose of this paper is to focus on the humanistic characteristics which futurists say will be needed by individuals as we move into a more interdependent world and to project some ways early childhood educators can begin to give an emphasis in early childhood programs which considers the changing aspects of the world in which young children are living today and in the future. Due to the short time allotted, the paper is a bare-bones approach without some of the elaboration and examples which would add to its interest.

Humanistic Characteristics Needed in the Future

Unless we believe that events of the future are inevitable--that we have absolutely no control over our private and public destinies, we must consider what kinds of persons are needed to help us obtain not merely possible and probable futures but also preferable futures. Part of the current revolution which characterizes our "Future Shock" world is the movement to bring man's thinking, his society and his life to terms with the revolution of technology and science that has already taken place. This revolution "demands a new individual responsibility for value, or it will dictate all values. And it promises a life that is more liberated and more beautiful than any man has known, if man has the courage to seize that life"(Theobold, 1972, p. 83).

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According to Margaret Mead (Mead, 1970), one of the urgent problems the world faces is the need to understand the nature of change in the modern world including its speed and its dimensions. Mead describes the society of our pioneer forefathers as postfigurative. In the postfigurative culture much of the unchanging culture remains unanalyzed and must be exemplified by three generations in continuing contact. In a society such as our own, there are inevitably generation breaks in education and styles of living. Transition to a new way of life is much easier when there are no grandparents present who remember the past. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the United States began to move to a configurative society. The nuclear family was established, a close relationship was no longer expected with grandparents and parents handed over to children the task of setting their own standards. Generation breaks became gradually accepted along with the expectation that each generation would experience a technologically different world. Mead (1970) believes that a new cultural form is emerging called prefiguration. She sees children today facing a future that is so deeply unknown that it cannot be handled as in the past. It is not only that parents are no longer guides. There are no elders who know what those who have been reared in the last twenty years know about the world in which they were born. The development of prefigurative cultures will depend on the existence of a continuing dialogue in which the young, free to act on their own initiative, can lead their elders in the direction of the unknown. It is only with the direct participation of the young with their experiential knowledge that we can build a viable future.

Man now has the capacity to interfere on a large scale with natural environmental processes. Science and technology permit the coexistence of new

realities yet our understanding of the new dimensions of change and of their immediate and long-range implications have not kept pace with the changes themselves (McHale, 1971). Toffler (1970) has indicated that we must understand how the effects of acceleration affect our lives before we can successfully search out ways to become more adaptable and more capable than ever before in order to anchor our lives and institutions against the effects of future shock.

A careful analysis of the kind of person futurists say will be needed to create a preferable future has revealed the following list of characteristics:

1. Ability to cope with change -- has a high level of adaptability, can adapt to constant and rapid change.
2. A strong positive self-concept -- has a sense of confidence and trust in one's ability.
3. A sense of purpose -- can live purposefully, and compassionately with others.
4. Future-focused role-image -- sees one's self in a future role, has a satisfying personal professional self-image.
5. Autonomous -- an inner directed individual, has strength to bear the unknown and peculiar, able to deal with strangeness, can be self-pacing in maintaining oneself within the adaptive range.
6. Clarity of Values -- has a basis for pursuing one direction instead of another, recognizes when things have greater value, makes difficulty value choices.
7. Interpersonal skills -- Ability to reach agreement through interaction and reasonable compromise, can work with others in cooperation and friendship,

can be a part of a unified effort, can engage in supportive and relevant interpersonal transactions, has skills necessary to supply honest and perceptive emotional support.

8. Sense of Mastery -- has a sense of control over one's destiny, feeling of confidence, self-realization.
9. Acceptant of responsibility -- can make up one's mind and assume responsibility, courage to do what needs to be done.
10. Learning abilities -- has skill in "learning how to learn" more than ability to learn a specific subject.
11. Capacity for innovation -- Uses imagination creatively, uses creative strategies for shaping, deflecting, accelerating, or decelerating change selectively.
12. Openness -- has a quality of being receptive to different points of view, ability to express feelings constructively.

When an individual is plunged into a fast and irregularly changing situation, his predictive accuracy plummets. He can no longer make the reasonably correct assessments on which rational behavior is dependent. To compensate for this he must bring his accuracy up to the normal level again. He must acquire and process far more information than even before and he must do this at extremely high rates of speed.

Early Childhood Education of the Future

In building a world that meets human needs we must start with the needs of infants. These give us the groundwork on which we can build for contact with other human beings, with the physical environment, with the living world and with the experiences through which the individual's full humanity can be realized.

Educators cannot simply go on doing the same things in education that have been done for generations. From now on learning must assume the presence of a time perspective geared to the future. Learning must be intimately bound up with the future, must help structure and give meaning to the future. Education must be more experimental and open ended.

This is even more complex than it may seem considering the characteristics of young children. The question that has to be answered is: What are the characteristics of young children which, if encouraged, will help them be better able to cope with the world of tomorrow? Some directions for early childhood education seem to rise clearly from the futurists' projections.

Development of a Positive Self Concept

The emphasis on development of a strong positive self-concept is not new to early childhood educators. What is new are the circumstances under which it is to be done. The difficulty arises because in the midst of change a young child must be provided with a continuous and familiar and trustworthy environment. This is necessary for the child to learn that things will be here tomorrow that are here today and that a hand reaching out will find what it is seeking, not only in the physical aspects of the environment but also in relationships. Also necessary is a feeling a competence--a gradual building of successes on successes so that the child is able to move out with confidence toward new ideas and information. A fundamental principle to be put into effect will be the recognition that human beings are not all the same and that children of different psychological temperament will need to receive different education. We have long talked about the differences in children but done little to accommodate these differences.

Focus on the Development of Coping Skills

This is only a new slant on an old emphasis. The young child's interest and involvement in the process of learning provides the basis for helping the child to identify multiple ways to find out about things and to solve problems. Instead of providing children with ready-made answers, it is important to provide them with varied real situations in which a variety of coping skills can be used, and to facilitate their use of such skills by asking questions such as: "How could you find out . . . ? How many ways can you . . . ? What would happen if . . . ?" Try to create within the child's responses a kind of flexibility and power to adapt quickly, rather than seeking a response in terms of rules and carefully transmitted conduct codes. Real choices beginning with such simple things as whether to work a puzzle or read a book, or whether to use tempera or crayon for a painting can be made by quite young children. Older children can engage in practical problem-solving situations which involve selecting from among several alternatives. Children will thus learn to feel comfortable in situations where answers are not all known. They should develop the creative resources to find solutions when none currently exist.

Consideration of Affect in the Approach to Learning

We need to consider how we can encourage the child to want to learn more and more. The emphasis here is on both a desire to learn and the development of the skill of learning. Children will have even greater needs for reading, writing, and expressing themselves than in the past. Their world has already expanded so that understanding of society in our country is no longer enough, as children's lives are influenced by our interdependence with other nations. It is important that we create an atmosphere in which children have many opportunities

to explore, touch, taste, listen, and experiment. Further, we must help them want to communicate the results of their exploration and to find answers to the questions that arise from it. As adults we can provide the setting, facilitate children's learning, and help them enjoy the satisfactions and successes that result. The responsibility extends beyond the actual facts or skills learned to the development of a joy of learning and the motivation to move on to new and more stimulating tasks.

Acquisition of a Future-Focused Role-Image

Cultivation of the future-focused role-image begins with the development of the self-image. School experiences should enable children to see themselves as competent and worthy people. In order to have these feelings, children must really be competent to do the things which are expected of them. The classroom, therefore, must provide for a variety of abilities and must aid children in selecting activities which are challenging but which at the same time allow them to be successful. Children must also like others and feel liked; their behavior must be reasonably acceptable to other children and adults.

Teachers can extend what they usually do to help children become aware of occupational options. In addition to taking the children into the neighborhood to learn about some occupations people engage in, teachers can greatly extend the kinds of materials they provide to help children role-play their observations of different occupations. A further step can be taken to introduce into children's discussions other occupational roles, those that might come into existence, and what the children might be when they grow up.

1. Schools will need to tap the information now stored in brains of many non-teachers. Greater awareness of future roles can be created without violating the child's more prominent present orientation.

2. In their early educational years, children should have the opportunity to meet a person engaged in any occupation in which the child might be interested. To deprive the child of this is to deprive him of an important step in the formation of his future-focused role-image (Shane & Shane, 1974, p. 75).

Emphasis on Cooperation

To live in the twenty-first century in sustained peace, it will be preferable for people to see themselves as relatively more cooperative than competitive. This means that the children's thought will need to depart from those of their twentieth century ancestors who placed greater stress on individually-oriented competition than on group-oriented collaboration. Fortunately, young children have not yet become competitive and small group projects can be provided to help them work together to achieve their purposes.

Development of Interpersonal Skills

Children also need to become aware of their interpersonal interactions with other children and adults. Perhaps of all the things that a teacher of young children can appropriately do, it is most important to help children understand how other people respond to their behavior, and how they respond to the behavior of other people. At a time when children are first becoming interested in doing things with other children, they will learn the human relationships skills that form the basis for the way they will interact with people. In order to do this, children must be able to relate freely to other children and they must have adult guidance for meeting a variety of situations.

Significance of Working with Parents

To suggest at this point that the role of the parent must be given careful consideration hardly seems necessary. Most parents want the best for their children but often their knowledge of education is limited to their own experience as a child in a school which was past oriented. We must help parents look at their children's education from the perspective of the child's future world and the kind of skills needed to adapt to the many changes both in personal and occupational life. It seems clear that the school alone cannot accomplish all that is needed for successful coping with tomorrow's world--that this is a job for both the school and the parents. Our recent research, which shows greater success for preschool programs when parents are involved, provides the beginning support, but we need to extend this research to provide greater insight into ways that parents and schools can work together more successfully. Value conflicts must be resolved and consistent directions for programs must be developed. One productive approach may be to develop programs for parents on futuristic education.

Conclusion

Fortunately, those concerned with the planning of educational programs can usually see ways the programs need improvement. To the current concerns we need to add recognition of the need for new strategies to develop future-oriented skills. We need to focus more on the kinds of skills children will need to cope with tomorrow's world that are within keeping with their abilities. This requires a different perspective from that commonly held. The degree to which success will be attained will be determined by the insight the adults have into the kinds of skills that will be needed and by their abilities to guide the children's learning.

Since we are talking of the future, none of us knows for sure what will be needed, but creative adults who help children cope with situations in creative ways will do much to provide hope for the future.

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